

Wilson; Ames

THE

PENNSYLVANIA HERMIT

A NARRATIVE

MOST EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

WILSON.

REPRINTED FROM THE PHILADELPHIA
EDITION.

SAINT JOHN, N. B.

PRINTED FOR AND BY E. W. MITCHELL

1840.

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THE
PENNSYLVANIA HERMIT ;
A NARRATIVE
OF THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY LIFE
OF
AMOS WILSON,

WHO EXPIRED
IN A CAVE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF HARRISBURGH, (PENN.)
AFTER HAVING THEREIN LIVED IN SOLITARY RETIREMENT
FOR THE SPACE OF NINETEEN YEARS,
In consequence of the ignominious death of his Sister.

ANNEXED IS THE
WRITINGS OF WILSON,
WHILE A RECLUSE,

**And his reasons for preferring a state of Solitude to that of the
society of his fellow-beings.**

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THE LIFE

OF

AMOS WILSON, &c.

AMOS WILSON, (usually termed "The Pennsylvania Hermit,") whose eccentricity and seclusion from human society for nineteen years, has excited so much curiosity in the western part of the state, was born in Lebanon, Dauphin county, Pennsylvania, in 1774. His parents were honest and respectable, although not very wealthy. Amos was their only son, whom, at the age of sixteen, they apprenticed at the stone cutting-business—he was a youth of correct habits, and during his apprenticeship very deservedly respected by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. His countenance was of meek and modest expression, and perfectly characteristic of a mild, affectionate temper; indeed, he was a youth who bid fair to become not only a valuable member of society, but the support of his parents in their declining years, had it not been for a most distressing circumstance, which not only forever destroyed their peace of mind, but rendered their son apparently the most unhappy of human beings.

Wilson had an only sister, but two years younger than himself of whom he was affectionately fond. She was a young lady of amiable disposition, and not less esteemed by her acquaintance for her virtuous and unblemished character, than the youth to whom she was so nearly allied; but alas, esteemed and beloved as she was in early youth for her love of virtue, at the age of nineteen cruel fate doomed this deluded and unfortunate young woman to suffer an ignominious death!

Deceived, and shamefully seduced by a wretch, who with protestations of love, and promises of marriage, succeeded in depriving her of all that could render her respectable in the

eyes of the world, with the hopes of concealing her shame, she in an unreflecting moment, committed a crime, which by the laws of our land is punishable with death! and for which she was tried, condemned, and publicly executed! The exertions that were made by a large number of the most respectable citizens of Pennsylvania, to obtain pardon for, and save this young woman from an ignominious death, were perhaps, beyond all example in this country; yet were unattended with success, until the day previous to that appointed for her execution. Her brother who had been constant in his applications in her behalf to the Executive since the awful moment of her condemnation, early on the morning of that day, hastened to Philadelphia, where he prostrated himself at the feet of the Governor, and with entreaties stronger than we have power to express, begged that in regard to his aged and afflicted parents, the life of their wretched daughter might be spared. The plea of mercy of the half distracted brother, bathed in tears, was irresistible; he was successful, and without a moment's delay, with feelings that can be better imagined than described, he hastened to convey the pleasing tidings to his anxious and expectant friends: but, alas! Providence seemed now to interfere to blast his fondest hopes. Almost at the instant that he considered them crowned with the most happy success, an unpropitious rain, which had fallen that day, had swelled the stream of a river which he was obliged to ford on his return, to such a degree as to render it impassable! For many hours he was compelled to pace the bank with bursting brain, and gaze upon the waters that threatened to defeat his fondest expectations! At the earliest moment that a ford was practicable, he dashed through, and arrived at the place of execution just in time to — see the last struggles of his unfortunate Sister! who was launched into eternity, but a few minutes previous to his arrival at the fatal spot, with her pardon!

He was a witness but for the moment of the heart-piercing spectacle, when in a state of insensibility he fell from his horse, in which situation he was conveyed by his friends to the habitation of his distressed parents!

This was a shock too severe to be easily overcome. For many months he remained in a state of perfect delirium; and from the moment that his senses were partially restored, he declared that the wound he had received was incurable;

that the world had now no pleasure for him, and that it was his determination the remainder of his life to seclude himself from human society.

In an unfrequented forest, twelve miles from Harrisonburgh, he found a cave suitable for his purpose, which he selected as the place of his future abode. In this lonely and solitary retreat he dwelt alone for the space of nineteen years, and was seldom visited by any one but the writer of these few particulars of his life, whom he selected as his confidential friend, and who occasionally supplied him with such necessities as his situation required.

HARRIOT WILSON, the sister of Amos, was born in 1776. She was early educated with the utmost tenderness; and every possible care was taken to impress on her mind sentiments of virtue and religion. She was of a sprightly disposition, polite in manners, and engaging in conversation—in a word, she in early age exceeded most of her sex in many of those accomplishments which are calculated to grace and dignify the female mind.

At the age of eighteen, Miss Wilson unfortunately became acquainted with a young man by the name of Smith, a native of Philadelphia; who, although there was nothing very attractive in his person, succeeded in ingratiating himself into the affections of this innocent and unsuspecting young lady. Her parents, aware of the impropriety of their daughter's forming too hastily an attachment for one who was yet to them a stranger, gave her that advice, which had it been strictly adhered to, would have preserved her innocent, and prevented the commission of a crime which brought their gray hairs in sorrow to the grave, and their daughter to a shameful death.

Not until the credulous and unsuspecting Harriot had surrendered to her vile seducer (by the repeated and solemn promises of marriage) all that could render her respectable in the eyes of the world, was it discovered that the vile author of her ruin was already a married man! and that his protestations of love and promises of marriage were without a shadow of sincerity—a wicked device, made use of only to enable him to effect the ruin of an innocent girl.

This poor deluded female now too late saw her imprudence in listening to the false vows of her vile seducer. To devise means that would enable her to avoid the disgrace that her imprudent connection was likely to produce, appears now to have been her principal object; and shocking to relate, she finally

formed the determination to put a period to the existence of one whom by the laws of nature she was bound to cherish and protect at the very moment that it was ushered into being! and unfortunately for her, this diabolical plan she carried into effect. The body of her new-born infant was found secreted in a neighboring grove. The unfortunate Harriot was suspected, and charged with being the perpetrator of the unnatural deed. On her examination, circumstances appearing against her she was committed for trial. Such was the respectability of her unfortunate prisoner's parents and connection, and such the sensibility cherished by all with whom she had been acquainted, that on the day of her trial the court room was early filled with more than it could conveniently contain. The trial lasted eleven hours, when the judge summed up the evidence with the utmost candour; but so strong were many circumstances against her, that the jury, being fully convinced of the commission of the fact, found her guilty!

During the whole trial, the unhappy prisoner exhibited an uncommon degree of fortitude, and seemed more to lament the misfortunes of her wretched parents and brother, on whom she had brought disgrace, than her own fate. During her confinement in prison, before and after her condemnation, she was visited by many of the clergy and other respectable persons, who were much interested in her behalf in consequence of her former uniform and amiable behaviour. She exhibited many proofs of penitence, and employed almost the whole of her time after her condemnation, in prayer, and in perusing the sacred scriptures. She entreated such of her young female friends who visited her while in prison, to take warning by her fate, and to be ever on their guard against the intrigues and seducing arts of the other sex.

There were very great exertions made by several of the most distinguished characters in the country to obtain a pardon for this unfortunate female; but without success. She had an only brother, whose grief for the wretched fate of his beloved sister, bordered almost on distraction. He, too, was unremitting in his exertions to save her from an ignominious death, and was too, unsuccessful until the very day appointed for her execution—but alas, as if doomed by Heaven to suffer thus ignominiously, he did not arrive in season with the pardon to prevent the execution of the law. The day of her execution arriving, by her request a suitable prayer was made by the Rev. D. White in her apartment and the sacrament

was administered. The parting between her and her afflicted parents, and many of those with whom she had been most intimately acquainted, was affecting beyond description. At half past 10 A. M. accompanied by several of the clergy, she was conveyed to the gallows, she having taken an affectionate farewell and leave of her friends; and rather appeared disposed to impart to their comfort than to repine in consequence of her own unhappy fate. When ascending the platform and after the fatal cord had been affixed, her countenance displayed a serenity that appeared more than human, and when she gave the signal there was a collected gracefulness and sublimity in her manner that struck every heart; and is above words or ideas. After she had been suspended nearly a minute her hands were twice evenly and gently raised, and gradually let to fall without the least appearance of convulsive or involuntary motion, in a manner which could hardly be mistaken, when interpreted, as designed to signify content and resignation. At all events independently of this circumstance, which was noticed by many, her whole conduct evidently showed, from this temper of mind, a composed and even cheerful submission to the views and will of heaven; a modest unaffected, submission entirely becoming her age, her sex, and situation.

In less than five minutes after the fall of the fatal drop, her brother arrived with a pardon, with the governor's signature affixed. A letter directed to this unfortunate brother was deposited by his wretched sister in the hands of one of the Rev. Divines who attended her, to be delivered to him as soon as he should return, and of which the following is a copy:

“My Dear Brother:

As the awful moment has nearly arrived, in which the dreadful sentence of the law is to be executed upon me I am confident that we shall meet no more in this world. Your failure to return yesterday at the hour appointed, satisfies me that you have again been unsuccessful in your application for a pardon, and that you wish to be as far distant as possible from the distressing scene, which a numerous throng of un pitying spectators are already collecting to witness. My dear brother, I am happy to inform you that I am prepared to meet my fate, and shall die penitent, and in peace with the world. I trust that I have made my peace with my God, in whose presence I must shortly appear. My dear brother, the most that I now

suffer is from the consciousness of the disgrace and misery that I have brought on you and my dear afflicted parents! Oh, may you endeavor all in your power to comfort them, and to satisfy them that it is the will of the Almighty and that their heavy afflictions in the decline of life may prove for their spiritual good. My dear brother, my last request is, that you cherish religion, and that you hereafter try in every way to promote it among your relatives and friends. It is this that will enable me to meet my fate with fortitude and resignation. I never thought, in the former part of my life, that it was possible for me to be so weaned from earth and my dear relations, and that I could have been so content to go down to the chambers of restraint your fondness for the vain amusements of this life; it will satisfy you of the importance of adorning religion by a holy, exemplary and blameless walk and conversation. It is in eternity my dear brother that we must expect again to meet; and oh, it is, and has been my constant prayer in prison that we may all meet there in happiness; until then I bid you an affectionate farewell.

"HARRIOT WILSON."

Thus fell, an early victim to the seductive arts of an unprincipled villian, the unfortunate, and once beloved HARRIOT WILSON.

The heart, not totally blunted to the sensibilities of humanity, must be so lacerated at the recital of this "tale of woe" as to have all other feelings extinguished by those of abhorrence for the seducer, and pity for the unfortunate victim of his arts. To behold a female, who, as it were but yesterday, was in all the bloom of loveliness—charming as a cloudless vernal morning—lovely as youth, beauty and innocence could make her—acquaintance, now, as an offender of the blackest cast, expiring on the gibbet, to appease violated justice, and a public warning against future crimes, must call forth the tears of sensibility, and awaken the pity of benevolence.

In this sublunary world, properly called the "vale of tears" calamities assail us on all sides; wherever we turn our eyes, human misery is presented to the view of all her dark and imposing attitudes, and the hideous form of vice stalks uncontrolled, in whatever clime we range. Man who was originally created in the form of his maker, and once lived in innocence, peace, security, and happiness, is now, for having disobeyed

the mandates of the Almighty, fallen from that blessed state, and is now surrounded with all the evils and dangers attendant on sin and misery. Satan like a roaring lion ranges about seeking whom he may devour, and man preys upon his fellow-man: often do we see the wicked rolling in riches and honors, while poor depressed merit is too often abandoned to poverty and scorn. The tenderness and sensibility that prevails in the minds of females, subjects them to many temptations and dangers from which men are in a manner exempt. Their weakness and dependent state places their reputation on a foundation so slender, that the smallest breath of wind will overturn, and the slightest touch indelibly tarnish. While lordly man can sin with impunity, and his most indecent deviations from modesty and virtue, set down as trifling indiscretions and oftentimes, the more he sins the more he is caressed. He can without any scandal to himself, seduce the innocent virgin from the paths of virtue, while the unfortunate victim of his arts is expelled from society, and doomed either to end her days in a brothel, among the most depraved, or be made a sacrifice on the altar of justice.

The family of the unfortunate subject of these pages, was a happy one until the intrusion of the vile seducer, when the unfortunate Harriot, the victim of his wicked arts, was the hope and joy of her aged parents; but in an unsuspecting moment their hopes were blasted forever; their gray hairs were brought in sorrow to the grave! A doating and only brother was thereby driven into a state of retirement, and during the remainder of his days lived a recluse from the society of men.

My fair readers—You see by the foregoing pages the gradation of evils attendant on a departure from that dignified modesty which renders you respectable and loved by the good and the worthy of the other sex. A chaste and virtuous woman sits exalted on the pinnacle of excellence, giving rational happiness and pleasure to all within the reach of her acquaintance; as a sister, she possesses the warmest affection of her brothers, and the value set upon her reputation very often prevents them from the commission of acts of folly which precede the depravity of vice; and as a daughter, the delight of her parents, and the sweet soother of the path down the vale of life from time to eternity. But mark the contrast. I am now to depict woman in her state of depravity, which I do with reluctance. View the scenes of dissipation, and the closing resort upon earth of these misguided females, who too credulous, lost

all that rendered them dear to society by not hearkening to the suggestions of the inward monitor. Turn your attention to those houses of debauchery where Vice reigns triumphant, and on whom poor mourning Virtue sheds a tear of pity. See what was once beautiful and enticing now converted into a load of corruption; behold the female form disfigured by blows and nightly abuse, carrying nothing human about it—nothing but what the eye will turn from in disgust—a burden to itself, and an incumbrance on earth, and you will know how highly to praise the value of female chastity.

But should your seducer not immediately forsake you, but keep you under his protection you stand on uncertain ground, subjected, as it were to the tyranny and caprice of a villain on whom you depend for support, and at whose option bound by no ties, he can cast you on the world at pleasure—then, step by step you fall into the current which leads to the verge of female chastity.

Wilson, in his dreary abode, was as comfortable as could be expected; a table, a stool, a bed of straw, and a few cooking utensils were all the furniture that his hut contained; although he never could be persuaded to shave himself, he was in other respects very particular in keeping himself cleanly attired and his habitation free from filth. The greatest portion of his time was employed in making mill-stones, which were disposed of by the writer, and the proceeds expended for such necessities as his situation required; much of his time was, however, devoted to reading and writing, of which he was extremely fond from his youth. The bible and other religious works were the books preferred by him, and he was always punctual in his morning and evening devotions, and repeatedly declared his strong faith in the Christian religion; adding that he felt perfectly happy and satisfied with his situation, and craved not the wealth of the rich in this world, as he sought treasure of the more estimable value in Heaven; and that he envied not the appearance of earthly happiness in any man, as he believed that he had bright prospects of enjoying that which was more permanent, in the life to come. Although he employed much of his time in writing, he ever refused to expose his manuscripts to the inspection of even his friend declaring that he intended them for publication after his decease; for, as it was his determination that his fellow-creatures should not receive any benefit from his society while living he hoped he should be enabled, at the termination of

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his earthly existence, to leave them a legacy, which if attended to, might prove for their earthly as well as spiritual good. On the writer's expressing to him his surprise (one day) that he should be found so willing to exclude himself from the social enjoyments of human society, he thus replied:—I live the life of my choice—I prefer being a recluse from the jars of a contending world, and the mistrust and jealousies of an ostentatious race, who have already inflicted a wound which they never can heal. Retired in this lonely cell, I meet not the neglect of ungrateful friends, nor hear the taunts of the children of pride. I court only the company of the Divine Spirit of the Most Holy, and the clamours of the foolish disturb not my pious meditations, nor the sneers of ignorance excite painful sensations in my peaceful breast. The shafts of envy, tipped with calumny, spend their force ere they reach me; and the vain of mankind may satiate themselves with folly, iniquity and deceit, and I shall not be rendered more miserable thereby."

But a few years since, this extraordinary and singular character expired in his hut, unattended by a single friend to close his eyes! His exit must have been very sudden: as he was left, the evening before in tolerable health, by the writer; in a corner of his cave was found a bunch of manuscripts, among which was that of which the contents of the following pages is an exact copy, and which he requested particularly might be published; and in conformity to which, we here present it to the public.

THE SWEETS OF SOLITUDE:

OR INSTRUCTIONS TO MANKIND,
HOW THEY MAY BE HAPPY IN A MISERABLE
WORLD.

"I've often thought and so think still,
Men may be happy if they will."

In this "Miserable World," so termed by a great portion of mankind, **HAPPINESS** appears to be their great pursuit: yet how few are there who have approached the goal of their constant pursuit and wishes! The only man who can be considered happy, is he who can reconcile himself to his circumstances, be they what they may; who can wean himself from the fashionable follies of the world, and content himself to live within the limits of his income. But how few are there who have the fortitude and resolution to pursue such a plan of conduct! The lust of power, the blandishments of wealth, the phantom of honour, are so many stumbling-blocks to their felicity.

Discontent is the universal bitter of human life: there are but very few who do not complain of some want or other, although the want arises only from the caprice of their will; things go not right if they run not on the wheels of their fancy, and turn about with the windmill of their brain. Not to amuse ourselves with hopes or fears, but to rest satisfied with our present circumstances, is alone the way to contentment; for he who wants nothing, possesses every thing. It is a contented mind that will give us happiness, as a constant in all conditions.

It is the part of a prudent man not to be elated with prosperity, nor irresolute in misfortune. The good man like the valiant soldier, will act up to his character, and behave brave-

ly amid his trials ; knowing them to be the hand of God, therewith he will be content, and scorning to repine will make himself happy.

The greatest cause of discontent is, that men have no definitive measures to their desires. It is not the supply of all their real wants that will satisfy them ; their appetites are precarious, they hunger not because they themselves are empty, but because others are full. Ahab, one would think, might well have been content with the kingdom of Israel, without Naboth's vineyard ; and Haman, with the obeisance of all the Persian court, without the additional bow of a poor Jew. A low condition in the world seems to all a terrible misfortune ; but how many are really poor amid their riches, and want in the midst of plenty.

The true felicity of life is to be free from perturbations ; to understand our duty towards God and man ; to enjoy the present, without any anxious dependence on the future. Not to amuse ourselves with either hopes or fears, but to rest satisfied with what we have, is abundantly sufficient : for he that is so, wants nothing. The greatest blessings of mankind are within us, and within our reach ; but we shut our eyes, and, like people in the dark, we fall foul upon the very thing that we are in search of without finding it.

One of the greatest secrets of life is that of knowing how to soften our uneasiness ; and if it be not in our power to disengage ourselves from the trouble, to weaken at least the impressions of it ; without this we must resolve frequently to be miserable, for, being exposed to numberless evils, hardly a day passes but we feel some new distress. Now I know of no remedy more effectual than pre-consideration ; and whoever has made an exact reflection upon the traverses of life, will find himself at least consolable in his misfortunes. I would have every one so far consider and expect all kinds of evils, as not to be surprised at any calamitous event. Let the happy courtier possess the favour of his sovereign, and enjoy to his wish the pleasures of his good fortune ; yet let the example of so many falls incline him to mistrust the security of his seat : let him not, although on the summit of the wheel, forever cast his eyes upward, but sometimes look down : let him view the place he began to rise from, let him consider the first degree of his advancement, as a precipice from which he may every minute be tumbled. Let not a prince be too fond of his empire ; let not the obeisance of such a world of people easily

flatter his self-love ; in four and twenty hours kings have been seen on a throne and behind a charriot, in a few days we have seen the same prince triumph, and led in triumph ; the revolution of the people, or the loss of a battle may ravish his crown from his head, and place his sceptre in the hands of a stranger.

Never pronounce any man happy who depends upon fortune for his happiness ; for nothing can be more preposterous than to place the good of a reasonable creature in unreasonableness ; and the less money the less trouble. It is a common mistake to count those things necessary that are superfluous, and to depend upon fortune for the felicity of life, which arises from religion and virtue. There is no trusting to her smiles ; that which she gives us this hour, she may deprive us of the next ; and he who trusts to her favors, shall either find himself deceived, or if he be not, he will at least be troubled because he may be so. Whatsoever our lot is in this world, we ought to bear it without a murmur ; a good man can never be miserable who cheerfully submits to the will of providence, although he may possess but a small portion of the riches of this life. To be truly happy in this world, a man must be content with his lot, in a cheerful and quiet resignation to the appointments of an impartial God. The joy of a sincere christian stands firm without interruption ; in all places, at all times, and in all conditions his thoughts are cheerful and quiet. Whether necessity or inclination has placed us in a secluded life, let us forbear admiring the labors of men, to contemplate the works of the Great Creator ; let us remove our thoughts from the pride and pomp of a court, and innocently enjoy the delights we find in solitude. The heavens, the sun, the stars, the elements, have they not beauties to satisfy the mind that contemplates them ? The waste of plains, the course of rivers, the meads, the flowers, the rivulets, have they not charms to enchant the eye ? Do we ever want the music of birds in our groves ? We may live contented every where if we change our pleasures with our abode. We find our account in this world in the study of nature ; it directs our thoughts to him who is the great author of it : our senses meet with their delights, and whoever is capable of moderation, will have full enough to content him. The most cruel tyrants can find no dungeon for our souls ; they cannot be masters

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of it any farther than we are willing to serve them; their chains cannot bind it, and in whatever place the body be shut up, the soul never changes its place or dwelling. Thus we may find contentment even in the meanest hovel, if we will only endeavour to make ourselves so. Let the man of a firm health not account himself happy only in the enjoyment of this good, but may the thoughts of suffering nothing among so many calamitous objects, which are about him, make him yet more content; let him enjoy himself not only from the good circumstances that are his lot, but from the evils too which do not befall him. May the pleasures he tastes, and the pain he suffers not, afford him equal satisfaction.

In reality, however innocent they may appear, excess is ever criminal, and produces not only infamy, but sickness and pain; a man who looses his reputation by a debauch, very often looses his health too, and wounds his constitution no less than his honor. It becomes every man to live with restriction. Pleasure is the view of our actions; and altho' we pursue different plans, we aim at the same point. Let every one live as is most agreeable to his innocent inclinations, and enjoy all the delights that offer, when they are consistent with the principles of conscience and honor.

It is preposterous for any one to expect to be truly happy in this world, unless he is truly pious; he who aims to be happy, with all his earthly possessions, if he possesses not religion, he is indeed a miserable inhabitant of what he is pleased to call "miserable world." True happiness is not to be found in the excesses of wine or of women, nor in the largest prodigalities of fortune. He who would perfectly know himself, let him set aside his money, his fortune, his dignity, and examine himself naked. It is dangerous for a man too suddenly or too easily to believe himself; wherefore, let us examine, watch, observe, and inspect our hearts.—We should every night call ourselves to an account.—What infirmity have I mastered to-day? or what passion opposed? what temptation resisted? what virtue acquired? Our vices will abate of themselves if they are brought every day to the shift. What can be more reasonable than this daily review of a life that we cannot warrant for a moment? There is a great variety in our lives, but all tends to the same issue—nature may use her bodies as she pleases, but a good man has this consolation, that nothing perishes which he can call

his own. We are born to lose and to perish ; to hope and to fear ; to vex ourselves and others, and there is no antidote against a common calamity, but Religion and Virtue.

Whoever seriously and meekly attends to the operations of his own mind, may soon find sufficient evidence there, to convince him that there is a God who made him ; to whose providence he owes all the blessings of his life, and by whose permission it is that he exercises and enjoys them—that he is placed in this “miserable world” so termed, but as a creature of a day, hastening to the place from which he shall not return ; that he is accountable for his conduct to the greatest and wisest of Beings, from the strictness of whose justice he must have every thing to fear ; but that he is exhorted to be humble and penitent, and cast himself in hope upon the infinitude of mercy, and the infinitude of goodness.

The creator of the universe, in that sublime and beautiful order which he in his wisdom hath established, seems to have appointed continual lessons of instruction to his rational creature, man. If the luminaries of the sky shine with superior splendor over our heads, it seems as though they were principally intended to diffuse light and heat, and impart joy and gladness beyond themselves. The world which we now inhabit is a world of trials and temptations ; and if we suffer our passions to take possession of us, it is no easy matter to break their force. If we once give a loose to our appetites, we know not when to hold the rein ; nor is it in our power always to stop short of vice, so frail is human nature—so strong the force of habit, that “it is easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it,” is a maxim, the truth of which, many a foolish, giddy, and unthinking youth has, too late, been forced to acknowledge. How many have we known who, from the indulgence of innocent amusements, have been led into excesses and crimes which have stained a reputation which would otherwise have been fair and irreproachable, and which have sometimes brought themselves to a shameful end. Innocent pleasures are as necessary to the support of the constitution and health, as salutary medicine ; but in keeping within bounds, there lies the task ; we progress, by slow degrees, till we arrive at the gulph of sensuality. As well may “the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots,” as those long “hacknied in the ways of vice” to reform ; the drunkard to become temperate, the gambler to lose a relish for cards or dice, or the sensualist

to give up his carnal desire. How important, then, is it, that those who have the care of youth should warn them, both by precept and example, to shun the excessive indulgence of pleasure, (falsely so called, a sure precursor of loss of health, reputation, fortune, and peace of conscience,) and to pursue the paths of sobriety, honesty, frugality and industry; to lead godly lives, in the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of knowledge! Thus will their lives be serene and happy and their exit peaceful.

In my solitary abode, secluded from the society of mankind, what pleasure have I enjoyed in contemplating the goodness of the Almighty! and should my life be prolonged to double the number of years which I have already passed, I would prefer a secluded life to that of mingling with the inhabitants of a world producing so many temptations calculated to beguile them from the paths of virtue and morality. Heaven is a witness, that in this rocky cavern I enjoy more happy moments than where I passed my laughing youth in the pursuit and indulgence of what is termed worldly pleasures. If I am not soothed by flattery, I am not wounded by ingratitude. If I have it not in my power vainly to boast of superior life, I am not the object of calumniating envy, and I am now too far removed into the shade for scorn to point its finger at me: my hopes no longer rest in vain, idle, fallacious objects, on private friendship or public justice: they have now a more durable foundation—they rest on Heaven.

Well did the ingenious writer say of Solitude, that in it "the mind gains strength, and learns to lean upon herself:" in the world it seeks or accepts a few treacherous supports; the feigned compassion of one—the flattery of a second—the civilities of a third—the friendship of a fourth! They all deceive, and bring the mind back to retirement, reflection, and books! But although mankind read so many excellent maxims of wisdom, and their judgments are so fully convinced of the lasting advantages of true philosophy, how frail, how forgetful, how much under the influence of the passions. But they are living monitors to teach us wisdom by their weakness! Whilst we remain in the world we are all fettered down, more or less, to one level, and have neither all the leisure nor all the means to soar above it, which we may procure to ourselves by breaking the fetters of retirement. To talk of abstracting ourselves from matter, laying aside

body, and being resolved, as it were, into pure intellect, is proud, metaphysical, unmeaning jargon : but to abstract ourselves from the prejudices and habits, and pleasures and business of the world, is no more than many are, though all are not capable of doing ; they, who can do this, who can become weaned from the world, and content themselves to spend a portion of their lives in solitude, may in their retreat elevate their souls to a higher station, and may thence take such a view of the world as the second Scipio took in his dream from the seats of the blessed, when the whole earth appeared so little to him that he could scarcely discern that speck of dirt, the Roman Empire. Such a view as this will increase our knowledge by showing us our ignorance, and will teach us to establish our peace of mind where alone it can rest securely in resignation. Such a view will render life more agreeable, and death less terrible. The idea of God, and the precepts of his holy religion (says a celebrated writer,) are never so little remembered as in the ordinary intercourse of society. Engaged in a multitude of absurd pursuits, intranced in the delirium of gaiety, inflamed by the continual ebriety which raises the passions and stimulates the desires, every connection between God and man is dissolved, the bright and noble faculty of reason obscured, and even the great and important duties of religion, the only source of true felicity, totally obliterated from the mind or remembered only with levity. On the contrary, he who, entering into a serious self-examination, elevates his thoughts in silence towards his God.

In the last moments of this life, it is certain that we all wish we had passed our days in great privacy and solitude, in stricter intimacy with ourselves, and in closer communion with God. Pressed by the recollections of our errors, we then clearly perceive that they were occasioned by not having shunned the snares of the world, and by not having watched with sufficient care over the inclinations of our hearts. Oppose the sentiments of a solitary man, who has passed his life in pious conference with God, to those which occupy a worldly mind, forgetful of its Creator, and sacrificing its dearest interests to the enjoyment of the moment : compare the character of a wise man, who reflects in silence on the importance of eternity, with that of a fashionable being, who consumes his time in the idle amusements of the world ;

and we shall then perceive that solitude and dignified retirement can alone afford true pleasure, and give us what all the vain enjoyments of the world will never bestow, consolation in death, and hope of everlasting life. But the bed of death discovers most clearly the difference between the just man, who has quietly passed his days in religious contemplation, and the man of the world, whose thoughts have only been employed to feed his passions and gratify his desires. A life passed amidst the tumultuous dissipations of the world, even when unsullied by the commission of any crime, concludes, alas, very differently from that which has been spent in the bowers of solitude, adorned by innocence and rewarded by virtue.

Were mankind to examine on what their hope of future bliss is founded, and anticipate that day of discovery and decision which is hastening upon them, it would excite diligence and awaken their attachment to inferior objects. To a mind conscious of his native dignity and immortality, this employment cannot be unpleasing or unprofitable. It is the highest proof of wisdom so to act in our present situation, that, when removed to another, the change may be as happy as it will be lasting. We need not fear that this will diminish our present happiness. The Gracious Being who formed us, requires no service at our hand but what will promote our present good. "Godliness is profitable to all things;" by living in conformity to its rules, we escape many evils, and are preserved in virtue and innocence. We enjoy every gratification that can give delight to a reasonable mind. Were mankind generally influenced by this noble principle, how happy then might be the state of human society. They would then cease to be miserable in a "Miserable World." The voice of discord would then be no longer heard. The various ranks and classes of men would be connected in the strongest and most pleasing band of union. "Righteousness and peace would kiss each other," and the present state of existence would be only a happy prelude to one still more exalted and glorious in the realms of eternal day.

By experience I well know that the highest happiness which is capable of being enjoyed in this "miserable world," consists in a peace of mind, and strict adherence to the principles of the Christian religion; and by experience I can assure my dear readers that the rich and the poor, the hap-

py and the miserable, the healthy and the sick, in short, all descriptions of persons, whatever may be their stations or their circumstances in this life, will experience infinite advantage in a retirement from the world. Solitude, when it has ripened and preserved the tender and humane feelings of the heart, and created in the mind a salutary distrust of our vain reason and boasted abilities, may be considered to have brought us nearer to God. Humility is the first lesson we learn from reflection, and self-distrust the first proof we give of having obtained a knowledge of ourselves. The wisdom that teaches us to avoid the snares of the world, is not to be acquired by the incessant pursuit of entertainments ; by flying without reflection from one party to another ; by continual conversation on low and trifling subjects ; by undertaking every thing and doing nothing.

A pursuit after happiness almost entirely engrosses the attention of man in his social state ; and though his visionary fancy may place her at a distance, yet, like the ignis fatuus to the benighted and bewildered traveller, she will constantly recede from the grasp in proportion to the pursuit, till death puts an end to our career. The contending passions of man render the acquirement of true happiness in a state of society abortive ; but the recluse, retiring from the caprice of a vain world, by reflecting on the beauties of nature, and the bounties of nature's God, enjoys a tranquillity which the social world cannot bestow.

That man is capable in private of an intercourse with his Maker, there are many living witnesses to prove, without having recourse to the visions of fanatics or the dreams of enthusiasts ; it may be proved to spring from natural or philosophical causes. God is a spirit ; so is the mind ; bodies can have intercourse, so can souls ; when minds are in an assimilating state of purity, they have union with their Maker.—Thus disposed, the Creator communicates himself to the soul, in a manner which is insensible to the natural eye as are the falling dews. Enthusiasm has swelled with unnatural conceptions, and obtruded a spurious offspring on the world, instead of the engaging child of reason and truth ; whilst the lukewarm have rested in a few vain and outward duties, which have had no vigor, and, as they spring not from the heart, never enter the temple of the Most High. Real piety is of a very different and of a much more animated nature,

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it looks up to God, sees, hears, and feels him in every event, in every vicissitude, in all places, at all seasons, and upon all occasions. It is theory verified by experience ; it is faith substantiated by mental enjoyments ; it is heaven transplanted in the human bosom ; it is the radiance of the divinity warming and encircling man. It is a spiritual sense gratified by spiritual sensations ; without this all ceremonies are inefficacious.

A fellow-being, with a cultivated mind enjoys peculiar satisfaction in the hours of solitude, and the most popular subject on which he can meditate and employ his attention and observation when alone, is the thought of deity. Not that he may doubt the existence of a Supreme Being ; but he can naturally, and with more perspicuity, meditate on his Almighty power, mercy, and benevolence towards poor, frail creatures of mortality. The sick, the sorrowful, and the discontented, may find equal relief in solitude ; it administers a balm to their tortured souls, heals the deep and painful wounds they have received, and in time restores them their pristine health and vigour. Sorrow, misfortune, and sickness, soon render solitude easy and familiar to our minds. How willingly do we renounce the world, and become indifferent to all its pleasures when the insidious eloquence of the passions is silenced, and our powers are debilitated by vexation of ill health ! It is then we perceive the weakness of those succours which the world affords ; the mind then seeks a balm in religion, and becomes more disposed to seek "its Guardian Angel and its God."

Thus, my dear readers, have I endeavored, as far as my feeble powers would permit, to satisfy you of the blessings of Solitude, and of the vast importance of cherishing religion in this world, that you may be fitted for another and a better. When you peruse these few pages, containing the best advice that I am able to give you, I shall have paid that debt which you must sooner or later pay ; my only prayer therefore is, that you may receive the foregoing advice with as much pleasure as it is given, and that it may ultimately operate as powerfully on your minds, as it has on that of the author.

Mysterious are the ways of Providence ; the same wheel which raises you to-day on the smooth, unruffled ocean of prosperity, may, before the morrow, roll you in the stormy

sea of adversity ; the scenes of this life are continually shifting, and "the fashion of the world passeth away !" Mankind in this world are ever subject to ills, infirmities, and disappointments—pains and perplexities are the long-lived plagues of human existence—but religion is the balm that heals those wounds, it was this that preserved me, and prevented my committing violence on myself at the melancholy moment when I was doomed to experience one of the severest trials of this life—when doomed to witness the melancholy fate of an affectionate and only sister, the companion of my youth, torn from her fond parents, and for many months confined within the thick walls of a gloomy prison, and from thence conveyed, (at the very moment that a pardon was obtained for her) to the gallows, there to suffer, like one of the greatest monsters of depravity, an ignominious death !—to view her lifeless corpse suspended in the air, surrounded by a throng of un pitying spectators !

But alas ! it is the will of God, to which we must submit. It was at this trying moment that he sent Religion and reason to my aid, and bid me no longer grieve for her whom I could not and ought not wish to recall to this troublesome world—for her whom I had just reason to believe had gone to the regions of eternal day, above the reach of sorrow, vice, or pain.

The consideration of the sorrows of this life and the glories of the next is our best support. Dark are the ways of Providence while we are wrapt up in mortality ; but convinced there is a God, we must hope and believe that all is right.

I am fully sensible, my dear fellow mortals, that our lives are strewn with difficulties, troubles, and disappointments ; that we daily experience the rod, which furnishes to us a lesson highly worthy of instruction. It is the very nature of things requisite that we meet with trouble while here below, in order that we know how to prize the felicity which awaits us in the heavens above : that he who bravely encounters the trials and misfortunes of this world, outbraves them all, counting them but as momentary afflictions comparatively to the joys which are set before him in futurity. We are apt to find fault, and conclude we are possessed of a greater share of worldly affliction than our fellow men, or more than our proportion in the scale of justice ; and are ready, as it were, to call heaven to witness our petition ; but I am persuaded man-

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kind are not so unequally provided for in this world as many imagine. " God is no respecter of persons," he favors one man no more than another, and his blessings are equally showered upon all his offspring.

As regards my own situation, few, very few, of my fellow creatures it is probable, could be found willing (after experiencing so many severe trials) to retire from the busy world, and be content to abide alone nineteen years within the walls of a solitary cave, as I have myself done. My situation has no doubt been pronounced unhappy and miserable by many of my fellow-beings ; but secluded as I have been from the society of man, depriving myself of the superfluities of life, I solemnly declare that I have enjoyed more real happiness in retirement than what all the riches and superfluities of this world could have afforded me.

My dear readers, I must now bid you an affectionate farewell. May the remainder of your days be spent in the faithful discharge of the duty you owe to the Supreme disposer of all events ! As your days shorten, may the sun of righteousness brighten over you till you arrive at the new Jerusalem, where tears are wiped away from every eye, and sorrow is no more !

AMOS WILSON.